

Unit 6: Montana: Land and People

Grade Level: 4–6

Time: 5–7 hours

Enduring Understandings

Montana is a place worth celebrating. Montanans in the past have made a difference to their communities, the state, and the world. You can too.

Contents

Part 1: Celebrating Montana with Montana’s Charlie Russell

Description: Students will “write their way in” to the unit, then watch an interactive PowerPoint on Montana’s most beloved artist. In Lesson 2, students will explore compositional elements of foreground, middle ground, and background in Charlie Russell’s paintings and create landscape paintings inspired by nature, using watercolor techniques.

Part 2: Amazing Montanans

Description: Students will read and take notes about thirteen Montanans as preparation for a game of Jeopardy. After learning about the different ways these Montanans made a difference, students will write about how they want to make a difference when they grow up.

Part 1: Celebrating Montana with Montana’s Charlie Russell

Time: 3-4 hours

Objectives

Students will

- Produce a “quick write.”
- Learn about artist Charlie Russell.
- Learn about composition, especially the idea of foreground, middle ground, and background, and possibly other elements of art (such as color, shadow, and shape).
- Learn basic watercolor techniques of wet-on-wet painting and wet-on-dry painting.
- Create their own watercolor paintings composed with a foreground, middle ground, and background.

Lesson 1: Montana’s Charlie Russell

Time: 1 hour

Materials

- **Reading:** [Montana: Land and People](https://mhs.mt.gov/education/Elementary/Unit6.pdf), available to download at <https://mhs.mt.gov/education/Elementary/Unit6.pdf>
- [Montana’s Charlie Russell](https://mhs.mt.gov/education/Educators/CMRussell) (elementary) PowerPoint, available to [download](https://mhs.mt.gov/education/Educators/CMRussell) at <https://mhs.mt.gov/education/Educators/CMRussell>
- PowerPoint Script, below
- Paper and pens/pencils

Pre-Lesson Preparation

- Review the lesson plan.
- Download the Montana’s Charlie Russell PowerPoint.
- Make copy of reading: *Montana: Land and People*

Procedure

Step 1. Write Your Way In

1. Ask students to take out a pencil and their writing journals, or a sheet of paper, and date it. Let them know that they will be thinking hard and writing for three minutes nonstop, as soon as you say, “Go!” You will be using a timer and they must keep on going, not lifting their pencils until the five minutes are up. If they are stuck for what to write next, encourage them to write, “I am thinking!” until they think of more to say. Remind them they can use their imaginations! Create a sense of urgency! For this exercise, they should not be concerned with spelling, etc. They should just think and pour out their thoughts on paper.
2. Provide students with the following prompt: “What makes Montana special? When you grow up, what will you do to make Montana even better?”
3. When the timer goes off at the end of five minutes, tell students to draw a line where they stopped. (Make sure they save their “Write Their Way Ins”.)
2. Pair/share their answers.
3. As a class read the introduction to the chapter, pausing after the sentence “here are just a few of the people whose stories are interwoven with the story of our state.”

Teaching Note: Save the rest of the reading for Part 2.

Step 2: Learning about Charlie Russell

1. Tell students that they are going to learn about someone who thought Montana was very special and who made Montana even more special through his work, the artist Charles M. Russell.
2. Show Montana’s Charlie Russell PowerPoint script (targeted to elementary students) that provides an overview of Russell’s life and work.

Montana’s Charlie Russell PowerPoint Script

Slide 1. Cover slide

Slide 2. Charlie Russell lived a long time ago, but he is still one of Montana’s best-loved artists. People liked him not only because he was a good artist, but also because he was a good storyteller and a good friend. His paintings show us what life in Montana was like many years ago.

Slide 3. Charlie was born in 1864. (As a class, figure out how many years ago that was.) He was born in St. Louis, Missouri, a big city located many hundreds of miles from Montana, but—like Great Falls and Fort Benton—it is also located on the Missouri River.

Ask: Can you find Great Falls, Montana, on the map? How about St. Louis, Missouri?

Slide 4. When Charlie was a boy, St. Louis was known as the “gateway to the frontier.” This meant that most people traveling west from the eastern part of the country started their trip in St. Louis. Often, they traveled by steamboat, like this one, up the Missouri River to get to Montana and other places along the way.

Slide 5. Charlie’s family owned many businesses. They lived on what had been a large farm, or plantation. Their home was called Oak Hill, and this is a picture that Charlie painted of Oak Hill. He grew up playing with his four brothers, one sister, and many cousins.

CLICK And, even as a boy, Charlie always loved horses. This is a picture that Charlie drew after he was grown. Do you think that the cowboy and the horse are good friends?

Slide 6. Young Charlie also liked to draw and make models. He drew on everything—including the steps of his house—and he even got in trouble for drawing in his books at school. He also made small horses and other animals out of clay and wax. His father entered some of Charlie’s models in the local

fair, and the models were so good that Charlie won ribbons for them.

Ask: How many of you have entered something in the fair? What was it? Did you win?

Slide 7. Charlie also loved reading books. He especially liked stories that told about people having adventures in the West. When he was very young, he wanted to be a pirate when he grew up. Then he read books about mountain men living in the Rocky Mountains and decided that is what he wanted to be instead.

Ask: Does anyone know what a mountain man was?

Answer: Mountain men hunted, trapped, and explored in wild areas, like the mountains of Montana, far away from towns. They hunted and trapped wild animals to make a living. They lived a long time ago (most common ca. 1810–1880).

Slide 8. What Charlie did not like was school. While he loved reading stories about the West, he never learned to write very well, and he often got in trouble with his teachers. Today we think that Charlie had a learning disability (dysgraphia—a disability that causes difficulty with written expression), but doctors didn't know about such problems back then. Charlie would skip school every chance he got, and often when he “played hooky,” he would go down to the waterfront to listen to the stories told by travelers and boat workers.

Slide 9. At some point, Charlie decided that Montana was where he wanted to live. At that time, Montana was not even a state yet. It became a territory in 1864, the same year Charlie was born. Before that, very few non-Indian people lived in, or even visited, Montana, but Native Americans had lived in the area for thousands of years.

Slide 10. When Charlie was fifteen years old, his mom and dad finally agreed to let him travel to Montana. His parents knew that life on the frontier could be very hard, so they hoped that living there would cure him of his dream to be a mountain man.

They hoped he would return home to work in the family businesses, but Charlie never did.

Slide 11. Charlie traveled west with a friend of his father's. He didn't get to take a steamboat like he always thought he would. Instead, he came by train and stagecoach. When he got to the Judith Basin in the central part of Montana Territory, he learned that his first job would be tending sheep. He didn't like watching over the sheep and, after he'd been on the job only a little while, he got mad and quit.

Slide 12. Luckily for Charlie, he was taken in by a mountain man named Jake Hoover. Charlie loved staying with Hoover, and the older man taught him many things he needed to know about living on the frontier.

Slide 13. After he'd been in Montana for two years, Charlie got his first job as a cowboy. He worked as a night wrangler; it was the night wrangler's job to watch the horse herd at night while the other cowboys slept. This meant that Charlie had to work all night and sleep during the day. When he wasn't sleeping, he had time to watch the other cowboys and draw pictures of what they were doing.

Slide 14. The Judith Basin, where Russell worked as a cowboy, was home to many Métis people. The Métis were the descendants of French and Scottish fur traders and Indian women, who developed a culture and language of their own. They were known for their multicolored, finger-woven sashes. Charlie loved everything relating to the Old West, and he adopted the Métis sash as a personal trademark.

Slide 15. During the time he was working as a cowboy, Charlie drew pictures whenever he could. He always carried a sock that held pencils, watercolors, and paintbrushes. He drew on whatever paper he could find. In addition to drawing, Charlie loved to tell funny stories. And his friends liked his stories even better than they liked his art. They also liked him because they knew he was a good friend—they could count on him to help if they ever got in trouble or needed anything.

Slide 16. Charlie worked as a cowboy for ten years, but he really wasn't very good at it. When Charlie was twenty-nine years old, he decided to quit being a cowboy and work full-time as an artist. While he was already better than average, at this point in his career he was not yet a great artist. It would take him many years of practice and lots of hard work . . .

Slide 17. . . . before he could paint masterpieces like this. Charlie was self-taught as an artist. This means that he learned on his own by studying the works of other artists that he saw in books and magazines. He paid close attention to the subjects that he wanted to draw (like working cowboys), he read books about history, and he practiced and practiced.

Slide 18. Although he was self-taught, Charlie also got help. Once he started to get famous, he became friends with other artists who gave him advice on how to become better. And, most importantly, his wife Nancy helped him by working as his business manager.

Slide 19. Charlie liked to draw and paint and entertain his friends. But he didn't like to ask people to pay money for his paintings. And he didn't like to make arrangements to hang his paintings in art galleries where they could be sold. Nancy became very good at these jobs. Because she handled all of Charlie's business for him, he became much more famous than he ever would have on his own.

Slide 20. Charlie painted and sculpted Montana scenes for forty-six years. While his art shows many different subjects, mostly he is famous for three things. First, pictures of cowboys. Charlie's paintings tell stories about cowboy life on the open range, before people put up fences. Many of his paintings are full of action and excitement, and they show cowboys hard at work.

Slide 21. Sometimes Charlie's paintings are funny, too, just like the stories that he told.

Ask: What do you think is happening in this picture?

Slide 22. Even though Charlie painted lots of pictures of cowboys, he made even more paintings of Native Americans. He had great respect for Indians, whom he described as "the only true Americans," because they lived here long before non-Indians started moving here from other parts of the world.

Slide 23. Charlie liked to show all aspects of Indian life, ranging from men hunting and fighting to women moving camp and cooking food. This painting shows a typical camp scene. The man is seated on the ground, smoking a pipe. The woman bending over is cleaning a buffalo hide.

Ask: What do you think the woman wrapped in the red blanket is looking at?

Slide 24. Charlie also spent time carefully watching Montana's wildlife and drawing pictures and making models of what he saw. He believed that "Ma Nature" could produce works that were far more beautiful than anything made by humans.

Slide 25. Charlie and Nancy owned a cabin, called Bull Head Lodge, in Glacier National Park. You can see the cabin—with Charlie and Nancy and some friends standing on the porch—in the photograph on the left. One of his favorite things about spending time there was watching wildlife, like these playful bears, in their natural habitat.

Slide 26. One reason people loved Charlie's paintings was because they told stories. People loved getting letters from Charlie for the same reason. Writing was a real chore for the Cowboy Artist (remember he probably suffered from a learning disability that made the act of writing difficult). So, his letters were short, but they were almost always illustrated. What do you think this letter is about? Can you guess who is in the picture? (It is Russell himself wearing his trademark sash.) Here's part of what he wrote: "I have just returned from the glasier ... They say the trail has been improved a lot since you were up. That may be but it will need sum more fixen before the goats are troubled with autoes."

Slide 27. Charlie often illustrated his letters with self-portraits that poked fun at himself.

Ask: What do you see in the illustration that would make you think that Charlie’s ride might have been difficult? (Charlie’s hair and clothing are messy, his sash has come undone, and the goat has stepped on his hat.)

Slide 28. Charlie always liked Montana better than anyplace else, but what he really loved best was Montana the way it was when he first moved here as a very young man. As he grew older, he disliked modern changes—like cars, or “skunk wagons,” as he called them—and his paintings became more and more nostalgic. That means that he focused most on his happy memories and painted pictures that showed life the way he remembered it.

Slide 29. Charlie lived a long time ago, but because he loved Montana so much, Montanans still love him. We proved our respect for Charlie by putting a statue of him in our national capitol in Washington, D.C., where he stands tall with heroes from all the other states.

Slide 30. The End.

Lesson 2: Watercolors of the Big Sky Art Activity

Note: This lesson was created by Sondra Hines for *Montana’s Charlie Russell* teaching packets, sent to all school libraries in 2015. More of Sondra’s art lessons and other lesson plans exploring the art of Charlie Russell are available on the Montana Historical Society’s [website](https://mhs.mt.gov/education/Educators/CMRussell): <https://mhs.mt.gov/education/Educators/CMRussell>.

Enduring Understanding

Learning about composition and techniques can improve your artwork.

Materials

- Images from the Russell Images [PowerPoint](http://mhs.mt.gov/education/docs/Russell/RussellImages.pptx), <http://mhs.mt.gov/education/docs/Russell/RussellImages.pptx>:

- Bronc to Breakfast
- Inside the Lodge
- Indian Hunters’ Return
- Free Trapper
- Laugh Kills Lonesome
- When the Land Belonged to God
- Watercolor paper
- Masking tape
- Masonite, heavy mat board, or other firm material to attach stretched paper
- Pencils
- Watercolor brushes, various sizes if available
- Small clean sponges for applying water to paper for wet-on-wet watercolor technique
- Rubber cement
- Watercolor paints in red, yellow, and blue or watercolor trays such as Prang Projector

Pre-Lesson Preparation

- Gather art supplies and review lesson plan.
- Watch [video](#) on watercolor techniques and practice them. <https://youtu.be/yl6V-gpkHOU>

Procedure

Step 1. Pre-Project Discussion

1. Tell students they will be making watercolors but first they are going to learn a little about how painters like Charlie Russell composed their pictures.
2. Explore and discuss all or a selection of the images listed above. Draw students’ attention to how Russell divided his paintings into three parts: foreground, middle ground, and background. This is a technique that many classical painters use even today, called the rule of thirds. Ask students what kinds of things they see in the background? The middle of the painting? The front of the painting? Ask them if there are any sketch marks visible? List items they find in each part of the painting. From this list students can choose elements for their own paintings. Additional items can be added as students think of them.

Step 2: Demonstrate and Discuss Art Techniques

1. Demonstrate the wet-on-wet watercolor technique for students.

Teaching Note: This technique is good for painting backgrounds. Apply water to a blank sheet of watercolor paper using a sponge or paintbrush. Create a wash by painting one color and then another color, allowing them to produce a soft, diffused look as the colors mix. The extent to which the two colors mix depends on how wet the paper and how diluted the paint is. You can get anything from a soft-edged shape to a widely spread pattern. The link below is an excellent [video](https://youtu.be/yl6V-gpkHOU) showing several watercolor methods, including all those listed in the lesson plan: <https://youtu.be/yl6V-gpkHOU>.

2. Demonstrate the wet-on-dry watercolor technique.

Teaching Note: If you want sharp edges to what you're painting, then any paint already put down on the paper must be dry before you paint another shape. Using a piece of watercolor paper that you have added color to and allowed to dry, apply paint creating a shape you desire, like a tree, grass, an animal, etc. If the first layer of paint is completely dry, then the shape will stay exactly as you painted it. If it isn't completely dry, the new layer will diffuse into the first one. Hair dryers can be used to speed up the drying process when time is a factor.

3. Demonstrate using rubber cement to mask areas of a painting the artist would like to remain white.

Teaching Note: Rubber cement will resist wet paint, keeping the area its original color. Simply paint the rubber cement on using the application brush or another brush designated for this use. Allow to dry and then paint over it. Once a painting is complete, the rubber cement can be removed by gently rubbing it off the

paper. This technique is good for creating aspen trees, clouds, snow, and other white things. Details can be added once the rubber cement has been removed, such as black marks on an aspen tree and subtle washes of color around the edges to create depth in clouds and snow.

Step 3: Creating a Watercolor

1. Have students stretch their watercolor paper by attaching it onto a firm surface using "linted" masking tape around the edges. It will look like the students have framed their paper in masking tape. To lint masking tape, have them press the sticky side to their clothing so it picks up lint. This will make the tape easy to remove.
2. Have students sketch the middle ground, choosing from the list the class created. The middle ground often contains the main action or subject of the painting.
3. Now is the time to apply rubber cement if needed. Use rubber cement for areas that students want to remain white (for example, an aspen tree might be painted in with rubber cement).
4. Paint the background of the painting using the wet-on-wet painting technique, creating sunrise, sunset, midday sky, nighttime sky, or whatever the student has chosen. It is okay if students paint, as Russell did, the entire background with a watercolor wash.
5. Once the background is dry, students can use the wet-on-dry technique to paint in their middle ground images. Allow the middle ground to dry.
6. The next step will be to add the foreground images to the painting, again using the wet-on-dry technique. The foreground may include grasses, small animals, rocks, and other objects inspired by Charlie Russell's work and from the class's list.

7. Finally, remove any rubber cement by gently rubbing it away and adding any details to the area that has been left white.

Step 4: Critique/Discussion

Have students do an informal critique of their works considering the objectives of the lesson. This can follow the class's regular critique format or the empathic critique technique described [here](http://www.bartelart.com/arted/critique08.html): www.bartelart.com/arted/critique08.html.

Art Vocabulary

Rule of thirds: The rule of thirds states that an image is most pleasing when its subjects or regions are composed along imaginary lines that divide the image into thirds, both vertically and horizontally.

Background: The parts of a painting or drawing found in the back.

Middle ground: The area in a painting or drawing that is in between the back and the front.

Foreground: The parts of a painting or drawing found in the front.

Watercolor wash: A watercolor term for a flat layer of very diluted color laid across the paper. It can either be an even layer of color or a graded layer that gets lighter.

Part 2: Amazing Montanans

Time: 1.5 to 2 hours

Objectives

Students will

- Read and take notes about the lives of select Montanans.
- Recall information.
- Imagine how they will contribute to the future of Montana or the world.

Materials

- Reading: *Montana: Land and People*, available to download at URL
- Jeopardy Game (Choose between the Google Slide version (which does not track which questions have been chosen) or the PowerPoint version (which does keep track of which questions have already been chosen). Google slide version can be [downloaded](https://tinyurl.com/273bafep) at <https://tinyurl.com/273bafep>. PowerPoint can be downloaded at URL)
- Biography Sheets, below

Pre-Lesson Preparation

- Review lesson plan.
- If you didn't do Part 1, make copies of readings.
- Make copies of biography sheets, four per team.
- Divide students into mixed-ability teams.

Procedure

Step 1: Read to Find Out

1. Tell students that they are going to learn about historical Montanans and then use their new knowledge in a game of Jeopardy.
2. Divide the class into groups of four. Pass out thirteen biography sheets to each group and tell them to complete the sheets, which their team will be able to use in the game. (Recommend that they divide up the work, so every student completes three to four bio sheets and then present their information to one another.)

Step 2: Jeopardy

1. When students are finished preparing, review the rules (Slide 2) and then conduct the game.

Step 3: Reflect

1. Pair/share: which, if any of these Montanans do you see as a role model?
2. As a class, read the concluding section "What Will Your Contribution Be?"

Step 4: Write Your Way Out

1. Ask students to retrieve their "Write Your Way In" free writes. Tell them they will be writing below the line they drew earlier for this next three-minute nonstop writing period.
2. Tell students that they are going to do another quick write, writing nonstop from the moment you say "Go!" until the timer goes off. Remind them of the procedure: they must write the entire time. They do not need to worry about spelling, grammar, or punctuation. Tell them to let their imaginations go wild, and if they are stuck for what to write next, encourage them to write, "I am thinking!" until they think of more to say. Create a sense of urgency!
3. Set the timer for three minutes and provide the prompt: "What would you like to do when you grow up? What will your contributions be?"

Name: _____

Biography Sheet

Subject's name: _____

Birth and death dates: _____

Place of birth (if mentioned): _____

Accomplishment(s): _____

Additional fact(s) about this person: _____

Subject's name: _____

Birth and death dates: _____

Place of birth (if mentioned): _____

Accomplishment(s): _____

Additional fact(s) about this person: _____

Subject's name: _____

Birth and death dates: _____

Place of birth (if mentioned): _____

Accomplishment(s): _____

Additional fact(s) about this person: _____

Content Standards

Montana Content Standards for Social Studies

MCSS.H.4.c Explain how Montana has changed over time given its cultural diversity and how this history impacts the present.

Montana Content Standards for English Language Arts

RF.4.4 Read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension.

CCSS.ELA.W.4.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.

CCSS.ELA.W.4.10 Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

SL.4.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 4 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

SL.4.6 Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, including those that signal precise actions, emotions, or states of being (e.g., quizzed, whined, stammered) and that are basic to a particular topic (e.g., wildlife, conservation, and endangered when discussing animal preservation).

Art Content Standards

1—Students create, perform/exhibit, and respond in the Arts.

2—Students apply and describe the concepts, structures, and processes in the Arts.

4—Students analyze characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others.